

Abstract

In a telephone conferencing system, a digital communication network such as the Internet is used to establish and control the telephone connections between multiple conferees with the telephone network being the means of exchanging verbal information. Each conferee may have a computer connected to the digital network, and each has an independent telephone instrument connected to the public switched telephone network. An in-charge conferee utilizes his computer containing appropriate software to initiate the conference and to control the participation of the conferees. The in-charge conferee sends digital control signals to a switch interface controlling a telephone switch as a gateway to the telephone network using SS7 control signals. These SS7 control signals include the commands by which the conferee telephones are rung up, brought on line, or dropped from the conference. The switch provides telephone status information back over the digital network, and the in-charge conferee, as well as other conferees provided with appropriate software, display this status information on their PC monitors.